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A HOUSING SURVEY

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The last century was a period of human achievement; the present century promises to be one of human improvement. We have been hoarding knowledge and wealth and boasting of what the human mind is capable of knowing and doing; we are now ready to use this wealth and knowledge and experience for the general improvement of the race by increasing its capacity for work, service and happiness. In a word, we are turning from the objective to the subjective in human society.

In dealing with housing conditions and the evils resulting therefrom we find that the lines of resistance to disease, infant mortality, longevity and industrial, moral and social efficiency may be unhesitatingly drawn along the boundaries that divide the community according to the condition of the homes and the living conditions which they render possible. This being the case it is of the utmost importance to ascertain the housing conditions of a community in order to ascertain the forces working against proper housing conditions and make possible the outlining of constructive housing policies consistent with the local facts.

The far reaching influences of bad housing conditions must appeal therefore to those who are interested in the welfare of the community for its own sake, as well as to those who calculate their social service in terms of increased efficiency in the daily tasks of the workers, and savings in financial responsibility both towards the city and the philanthropic agencies of the community. The work of ascertaining housing conditions of the people should therefore be done with the utmost care and the results weighed in terms of health as well as in terms of moral standards and industrial efficiency.

The most serious defects of housing reform work in America are the assumptions that the problem is one apart from the rest of the community and that it is wholly a problem of sanitary accommodations. That the absence of town planning and the general environmental conditions outside of the home coupled with inflexible

and frequently antiquated laws and practices are the real menace of the home must, however, be realized.

The broad point of view of the problem may be briefly stated as the providing of healthful accommodations, adequately provided with facilities for privacy and comfort, easily accessible to centers of employment, culture and amusement, accessible from the center of distribution of the food supply, rentable at reasonable rates and yielding a fair return on the investment.¹ That the housing problem will always be with us unless we consider its more intricate and far reaching relationships to our entire social and governmental practices is daily becoming clearer to both social workers and enlightened statesmen.

The sanitary aspects of the housing problem should be considered along the following lines:

Conditions of Dwellings

1. Is the locality a community of homes or of three and four or more family houses and what is the number of each type?
2. What is the average proportion between rental and family income? (If this cannot be ascertained, the rental per tenement by number of rooms in some characteristic sections should be considered.)
3. Are the families crowded in small tenements and what is the extent of the crowding? (Number of persons per room, crowding in bedrooms, etc.)
4. How frequently are roomers taken in to piece out rents?
5. Is the water supply in the homes of good quality and sufficient for the use of the families?
6. Is there a sewer system and is it connected with the dwellings in all parts of the city? If not what is the number of dwellings not connected and the number of families and individuals affected?
7. What is the character of the toilets; are they located in apartments, cellars, halls, basements or yards and are they connected with the sewer? (Secure facts concerning each.)
8. Are toilets used by one or more families each and to what extent is overcrowding in toilet use prevalent?

¹ Carol Aronovici, "Constructive Housing Reform" in *National Municipal Review*, April, 1913, p. 221.

9. What types of toilet ventilation are prevalent?
10. To what extent are bathrooms provided in the poorer sections of the community?
11. Is household refuse removed by the city and what is the method and frequency of removal?
12. How frequent are windowless rooms in dwellings?
13. How frequently are rooms dark because of proximity of buildings, lighting through airshafts or narrow courts?
14. Are yards provided in tenements and what are the prevailing sizes?

Environment of Dwelling Houses

1. What is the average width of the tenement streets and how wide are the sidewalks?
2. Are the streets swept, watered, flushed or oiled in the tenement districts and if so how often and by what methods?
3. Are the streets paved and what is the type of pavement in tenement districts?
4. Are playgrounds provided in the crowded districts?
5. Are street car lines common in these districts and is the use of the streets by children dangerous?
6. Are saloons common in the residential districts and to what extent are they found in buildings occupied by private families?
7. Are houses of prostitution or prostitutes permitted in the neighborhood of or within dwellings?
8. Are the dwellings in the proximity of the factories and are they affected by smoke, gases or other by-products which might be injurious to health?
9. Are there in the proximity of dwellings swamps or lowlands which breed mosquitoes or produce offensive odors?
10. Are noises prevalent in the dwelling districts that could be reduced or avoided?
11. Are abandoned buildings common in the neighborhood and are they protected against improper use by tramps and persons of questionable character?

Rooming Houses

With the growth of industries and the migration of labor from one center to another has come a problem of housing persons living away from their families, which in many cities has assumed large proportions and frequently constitutes a serious social problem. The rooming houses and the hotels are the places which largely provide homes for this class of population and the consideration of these hotels and rooming houses should receive attention in the body of a housing survey. The problems connected with this type of housing can be stated in this manner:

1. What is the total population by sex living away from home?
2. What is the number of rooming houses connected with private homes?
3. What is the number of hotels and public rooming houses and what is the method used in conducting them?
4. Are they controlled by local or state legislation, what is the character of this legislation and what authority enforces it?
5. Are there any special rooming houses provided by philanthropic agencies and what is their capacity?
6. Are there houses or tenements in which men keep house without women and what is their number and condition?
7. What is the sanitary condition of the rooming houses and hotels? (Use as a basis for study the questions on conditions of tenement houses.)

Ownership of Homes

Closely connected with housing conditions is the rate of home ownership existing in the community. Ownership determines not alone the condition of the homes, but the stability of the population, the standard of citizenship and self-respect.

The main questions in connection with this subject to be asked are as follows:

1. How many families own their own homes?
2. Is the tendency to own homes on the increase or on the decrease?
3. Are the individually owned homes on the average better than the homes owned by other persons or corporations?
4. What is the general character, size, building material, and architecture of individually owned homes?

5. What is the average assessed valuation of the individually owned workingmen's homes?
6. What is the per cent of individually owned homes free from mortgages?
7. Are mortgages on homes taxed separately from the property itself?
8. What are the building associations that promote individual home building?
9. What are the practices of the local banks with regard to loaning money on mortgages or for building purposes?
10. To what extent do the mills provide houses for their employees?

It will be found upon examination of the facts revealed by an inquiry into home ownership that a disappointingly small proportion of the workers own their own homes. That this is due to clearly definable causes cannot be doubted and a survey should not hesitate to ascertain them. The taxing of mortgages, the taxing of improvements upon land, speculation in land values, lack of coördinate distribution of transportation facilities and employment centers, ungenerous and over-conservative banking practices and the high price that the wage earner must pay for the use of capital are among the main causes of the small proportion of home owning wage earners. That these causes can be removed or their force reduced has been amply demonstrated both in this country and abroad where a desire for improvement along these lines has been manifested.

As may be seen from the above general consideration of the subject the problems of housing may be segregated into three groups namely:

- A. *Sanitation*, which determines to a considerable extent the health and efficiency of the workers.
- B. *Congestion*, which has to do with sanitation as well as the morals of the tenants.
- C. *Ownership*, which largely influences the stability, thrift, and citizenship of the population.

When facts concerning the housing conditions have been collected and so arranged as to give a clear conception of the problem, a thorough study of the laws relating to housing, sanitation and house building should be made. This can best be done by persons familiar with handling legislation and with the building trade

Whenever it seems apparent that the building laws are insufficient to meet the needs of the community an examination of the aspects left without legal provision should be included in the survey. When the laws in existence do not seem to be enforced much profit may be derived from an examination of the aspects of housing legislation unenforced and a consideration of the machinery provided for its enforcement should be made from the following points of view:

1. Is the machinery and appropriation provided for the enforcement of the law sufficient to meet the local needs?
2. Is the law clear and definite enough to empower the officials to enforce it?
3. Are the officers efficient and honest in the performance of their duty?

These three questions should be applied as a test to all legislation dealing with social conditions and whenever possible the officials concerned should be consulted and their work examined with a view to securing facts and whenever possible, coöperation.

Relation of Homes to the Community

In the foregoing sections dealing with housing the individual building is considered as an independent entity, without any close relationship to other buildings or the neighborhood. Strictly speaking, this has been the prevailing point of view in most housing reform movements which have found their most concrete expression in legislation and inspection. Accessibility to place of employment, educational, cultural and amusement centers, marketing facilities to insure a cheap food supply have not received the attention they deserve in a broad treatment of the housing problem. "The city beautiful" as expressed by the town planning movement has found little favor with the housing reformers and still less with the local governments and real estate interests. The cost of land and construction of houses has not been studied with a view to developing constructive policies whereby houses may be built cheaply and rental rates maintained on a scale which would make possible good houses for all, yielding a reasonable return upon investments without placing an unreasonable burden upon the tenants.

These are important problems to solve and studies along these lines may be started by answering the following questions:

1. What transportation facilities are the street car and railway systems providing to facilitate the transportation of employees?
2. Are reduced fares for working people provided?
3. Are the outlying districts provided with adequate transportation facilities so as to make access to amusement and cultural centers easy and cheap?
4. What are the differences in the average cost of staple foods between the congested sections and the outlying districts?
5. Is the city following a carefully worked out plan in its development of streets, parks, playgrounds, etc., or are the real estate interests the main factor in the development of the community?
6. Are large tracts of land being opened up for residential purposes and what steps are being taken by the community to insure symmetry, open spaces, etc.?
7. Can individual homes be built at a sufficiently low cost to make possible reasonable rents and a fair return upon the investment? If not, why?

A fair and thorough housing survey of housing conditions and their causes will raise economic and administrative questions, far removed from the usual conception of the problem and which require immediate radical changes in our present practices. This may help to clear the way toward intelligent town development which is so frequently encumbered by legislative junk and archaic administrative practices.